

SUMMER 2004

The Tribal Update is a quarterly publication of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. It is distributed to leaders of all eight state and federally recognized tribes, as well as other interested parties.

Alternative accessible formats of this newsletter will be provided upon request. For further information or additional copies, contact Gayle Shirley, DPHHS Public Information Officer, at 406-444-2596 or gshirley@state.mt.us

75 copies of this public document were published at an estimated cost of 4 cents each, for a total cost of \$3.00.

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

TRIBAL UPDATE



Most Indian Consumers Satisfied with State Mental Health Services

American Indians who use mental health services in Montana are generally satisfied with those services, according to a survey conducted recently by the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division (AMDD) of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

AMDD and mental-health care providers distributed the survey last October to three distinct groups: families of children aged 12 and younger, youth aged 13 to 20, and adults. Participants were asked to quantify their overall satisfaction with services as well as their satisfaction specifically with access to services, appropriateness and quality of services, and effectiveness of services. Teens and families were also asked to rate the cultural sensitivity of services.

Twelve percent of mental health consumers in Montana are American Indians, according to AMDD.

Fifty-five adult Indians representing more than 20 tribes were among the adults surveyed. Their overall satisfaction with mental health services was slightly higher than that of the overall survey sample of adults. They expressed the least satisfaction with the effectiveness of services, though they were still more satisfied than the overall sample.

Of the families who participated in the survey, 8.9 percent were American Indian, and they represented seven tribes. As a group, family participants expressed the highest satisfaction with the cultural and religious sensitivity of mental health services. Among the statements they ranked highest were:

(continued on next page)

Mental Health *(continued from page 1)*

- Staff spoke with me in a way that I understood.
- Staff treated me with respect.
- Staff respected my family's religious/spiritual beliefs.

Families were least satisfied with their children's progress in treatment, particularly their ability to cope under stress.

A quarter of the youth surveyed were American Indians, and they represented 14 tribes. There were no significant differences between the satisfaction scores of Indian and non-Indian youth. Indian girls tended to be more satisfied than Indian boys with family relationships but less satisfied with social relationships.

Indian youth, like their adult counterparts, expressed the greatest satisfaction with the cultural sensitivity of mental health services. Like all of the teens surveyed, they were least satisfied with the amount of meaningful participation they had in designing their own treatment.

The National Center for Mental Health Services requires all states to submit information each year documenting how successful their mental health services are in providing modern, evidence-based treatment, access to treatment, and recovery for mental health consumers.

Coming up in the next issue:

*DPHHS employees describe
their experiences at the
Two Worlds Cultural
Immersion Camp
August 8-13
on the Crow Reservation*

"This survey is a tool consumers can use to tell the federal government how well we're doing," said Bobbi Renner, quality assurance manager for the Mental Health Services Bureau of AMDD. "It also lets us know how well our service providers are doing, and it lets providers know what works well and what needs to be improved."

The survey is conducted annually and anonymously, in order to encourage frank responses.

"We would really like to have more input from Native American consumers," Renner said. "So we encourage consumers and their families to contact us to get a survey."

For more information or a survey form, contact the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division toll-free at 1-888-866-0328.

Homelessness Rate Higher among Indian Population

American Indians are overrepresented among the ranks of Montana's homeless, according to a report released in June.

The report, *Homeless in Montana*, was based in part on an annual survey sponsored by the Intergovernmental Human Services Bureau of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. The point-in-time survey indicated that the rate of homelessness among Indian people was two or three times higher than one might expect based on 2000 census data.

Poverty and lack of living-wage jobs were found to be among the pivotal precursors to homelessness in Montana, and these factors disproportionately affect Indian people. Poverty rates on Montana reservations ranged from 34 percent on the Blackfeet Reservation to 50 percent on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation at the time of the 2000 census. Tribal calculations from 1999 revealed unemployment rates ranging from 36 to 76 percent.

Other factors that were found to contribute to

homelessness were mental illness, substance abuse, disability, and domestic abuse.

“In addition to the obstacles faced by all homeless people, Indian people may be facing additional barriers in their efforts to become housed,” the report said.

It goes on to note that a HUD study released in November 2003 found that white renters were frequently favored over their American Indian counterparts during tests in Billings, Great Falls, and Missoula. White renters were more often told that an advertised rental was available than were similarly qualified Indian testers inquiring about the same unit.

Partially in response to the report, Governor Judy Martz created the Montana Council on Homelessness in June. Members include Gordon Belcourt, executive director of the Montana-Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council, and Sherry Scheel Matteucci, whose law firm provides legal and advocacy services to many of Montana's tribes.

The council will convene a subcommittee to focus exclusively on homelessness among Indian people in Montana, both on and off reservations.

For more information, contact Jim Nolan, Human and Community Services Division, at 406-447-4260 or jnolan@state.mt.us. Or contact Sherrie Downing at 406-443-0580 or downingsl@bresnan.net.

The report is available online at www.dphhs.state.mt.us/homeless_in_montana.pdf.

Tribal Members Play Role in Border Security Conference

Representatives of four tribal nations in Montana and one in Canada added a valuable perspective to a conference on international border security held in Whitefish in May.

The Cross-Border Terrorism Preparedness Conference, co-chaired by DPHHS and the U.S. Attorney's Office, attracted more than 250

participants, including members of the Blackfeet, Confederated Salish and Kootenai, Crow, Fort Peck and Piikani nations, and the FBI, Customs and Border Protection, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and emergency responders, laboratory and hospital staff from British Columbia, Alberta, and Montana.

The purpose of the conference was to bring together the diverse groups that are responsible for coordinating public health and emergency preparedness efforts to ensure a secure border between Canada and the United States.

The conference agenda included a Native American roundtable and a special Native American theme dinner. Louie Adams, an elder from the Flathead Reservation, offered the opening prayer at the roundtable. Burton Pretty On Top, a Crow spiritual leader, made a special presentation at the Native American dinner and offered the closing prayer at the end of the conference. Earl Old Person, a Blackfeet councilman, enlivened the conference by bringing a drumming group.

A highlight of the conference was a presentation by Blackfeet tribal member Michael Kittson, a member of the Shadow Wolves, an entirely Native American unit of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. *Smithsonian* magazine recently described the Shadow Wolves as “possibly the world’s best trackers.”

A second border security conference is scheduled for August 17-18 in Glasgow for officials from eastern Montana, North Dakota and Saskatchewan.

For more information, contact Sally Johnson, Emergency Preparedness Manager, at 406-444-4016 or sajohnson@state.mt.us.

WIC Breastfeeding Poster to Feature Montana Indians

American Indian women from across Montana will be featured on a new poster designed to encourage breastfeeding among the Indian population.

The poster will be available in August from the

Montana Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). World Breastfeeding Week is August 1-7.

Local WIC offices recruited volunteers last spring to pose for the poster while breastfeeding.

“We had such a wonderful response and so many beautiful pictures that we’re actually planning to make two Native American posters,” said Lori Rittel, nutritionist with the state WIC office, “a smaller, simpler one and a larger one with women from various tribal backgrounds.”

The posters will be displayed in all WIC locations across the state.

“We’re hoping this kind of visual promotion will increase interest in breastfeeding,” Rittel said. “We would like to bring the breastfeeding rate among Native American women up to that of white women.”

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Indian women in Montana are 10 percent less likely to breastfeed than Caucasian women. Yet breastfeeding has been shown to be better than formula feeding for both mother and infant.

Breast milk contains antibodies that help protect infants from bacteria and viruses, Rittel noted. So breastfed babies are better able to fight off infection and disease, such as diarrhea, ear infections, and respiratory illnesses like pneumonia. They are sick less often and make fewer visits to health care providers.

Breastfed babies tend to have higher IQs and a lower risk of developing leukemia, multiple sclerosis, or heart disease, Rittel said.

Breastfeeding also has been found to reduce the likelihood of becoming overweight later in life and

thus helps to prevent type 2 diabetes, which is more prevalent among the American Indian population.

Mothers who breastfeed often lose the weight they gained during pregnancy faster, and they are less likely later in life to develop osteoporosis or cancer of the breast, ovaries, or cervix.

Finally, breastfeeding is less expensive, saving as much as \$1,000 in formula costs during the first year of an infant’s life, Rittel said.

Along with the posters, WIC plans to distribute a free booklet entitled “An Easy Guide to Breastfeeding for American Indian and Alaska Native Families,” which was produced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health.

Posters and booklets will be available from Rittel, 406-444-5285 or lrittel@state.mt.us.

Native American Advisory Council to Meet on Aug. 18

The Native American Advisory Council will meet August 18 in the third floor conference room of the Indian Health Services in Billings.

The IHS is located in the Judge Jameson Federal Building, 2900 Fourth Avenue North. Participants will need to bring identification in order to pass through building security.

Joe Nuñez, Region VIII director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is scheduled to attend.

For more information, contact Janet Kracher, Indian child welfare specialist for DPHHS, at 406-444-9748 or jakracher@state.mt.us.



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